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Geary County

K-State Research and Extension News

*Knowledge
for Life*

Ask the Agent

Q: I have been with the same Medicare supplemental insurance since I turned 65. I recently had an outpatient procedure done in Salina that cost me much more than the same procedure done at the same facility in 2012. Why such a dramatic difference in only 4 years?

A: Health care facilities have experienced an increase in costs over the past 4 years which would make up some of the cost difference. However, if it was dramatic, you might want to find out if the facility that did the procedure is no longer in your health care plan's network.



For more information call the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at:

785-238-4161



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Chronic Pain and Communicating It Effectively

May 2016

I recently wrote a newspaper article about the addictive nature of opioid pain medications. Statistics reported by the Centers for Disease Control state that nearly 2 million Americans abused or were addicted to pain relief prescription opioids in 2014. Since 1999, sales of prescription opioids nearly quadrupled in the United States.



These medications are most certainly a necessary alternative to some who are experiencing chronic pain. Chronic pain is that which lasts for a minimum of 3 months or lasts beyond the normal time for healing tissue. Those who are in active cancer treatment or end of life care can find great relief from the pain associated with their health status. However, for those with arthritic pain, headaches, and other ailments, it is wise to ask a lot of questions from a prescribing physician about the impact of ANY drug recommendations, especially opioids. It is important for you to look at alternatives they can provide based on the level of pain you are experiencing to avoid the risk of addiction to these types of medications.

One of the challenges your doctor may find in identifying the best pain management plan for you is in determining your level of pain. Unlike your cholesterol level, blood pressure, or blood sugar, there is no specific test that can provide objective numbers to help determine the best course of action. Instead, you are asked to describe the pain and your accuracy is critical to a doctor's decision regarding your care.

The National Initiative on Pain Control has provided diagnostic tools to assist in the process of determining your pain management plan. One of the more common rating scales for pain is the Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating Scale. This scale is recommended for those who are age 3 and older. It asks a person to look at faces to express the level of pain they are experiencing. Too often, people think that they should downplay their pain and don't express an accurate depiction of what they are feeling. Phrases such as "it's not too bad" or "I've felt worse/better" don't give a good indication of your pain level. Additionally, pain tolerance varies from person to person. What may seem like minimal pain to one person may be excruciating pain to another.

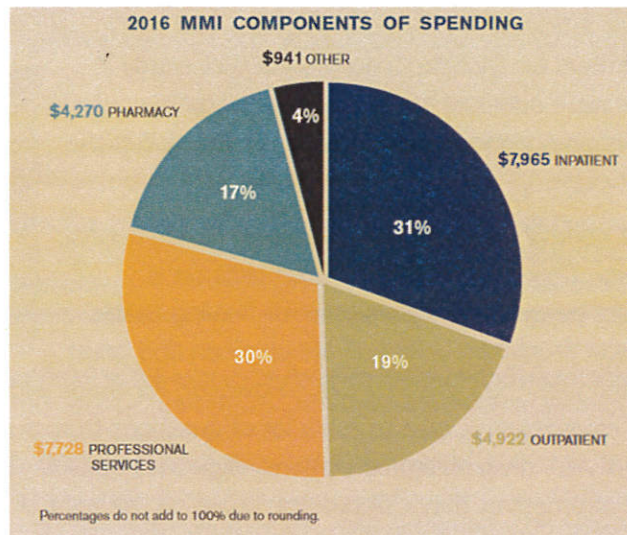
If you suffer from chronic pain, you shouldn't hesitate to talk candidly with your doctor. Chronic pain (pain that lasts for 3 months or more or past the time of normal tissue healing) can be caused by a variety of things and a variety of approaches can be used to manage it, depending on the cause of the pain.

The first step to creating a pain management plan is open communication with your doctor. Check out the article on the inside regarding specific tips on how to communicate effectively about your pain with your doctor.

Health Care Costs for American Families Have Tripled Since 2001

It costs the typical American family over \$25,000 yearly (\$25,826 to be exact) for health care – an expense that has tripled in the last 15 years.

Where is our health care money being spent? In the graph below, the 2016 Milliman Medical Index (MMI) reports the following areas of health care costs:



MMI has been reporting on American Health Care costs since 2001. The 2016 statistics reflect the lowest annual increase in 15 years yet healthcare spending for any given family can range from \$0 to millions per year.

For employees who have employer health insurance, there was a 5.3% increase in out of pocket costs over last year. In 2001, employers paid 61% of costs while employees paid 39%. This year, the same split registers at 57% and 43% according to MMI.

What can a consumer do to reduce their health care costs?

- 1) Stay in your health insurance network. Jackie Aube, a senior vice-president of Cigna shares this advice: **"The most expensive health care mistake you can make is to go out of your health plan's network."** The cost difference can be significant – perhaps as much as 50% higher for services provided by out of network service providers. Before you visit a doctor or have a procedure done, ask both your insurer and the providers if they are included in your health care plan's network.
- 2) Ask questions to find out about extra incentives your health care plan might provide by working with specific in-network providers. Some doctors have been ranked based on their quality of care or cost efficiency for care. This could lead to lower co-payments or coinsurance rates. Use the search tool on your plan's website to see if this is available to its members.
- 3) Shop around for the same services provided by you in-network facilities. For example, Aube shares that the average outpatient hospital cost for MRIs and CAT scans is \$1,384 to \$1,668 while the average radiology center cost ranges from \$445 to \$725. For more ideas about how you can reduce your family's health care costs, check out Kiplinger Magazine's online article at <http://www.kiplinger.com/fronts/archive/slideshow/> and search for "50 Ways to Cut Your Health Care Costs".

Healthy Habits

Open Communication with Care Providers

In a newsletter article, "How to Talk About Pain with Your Doctor" published by the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Dr. Natalie Moryl says the first critical step in addressing pain issues is to speak up. Communicating pain to your doctor is not only important, it is one of the first pieces of information to highlight when sharing symptoms with your doctor.

Dr. Moryl explains that by reporting pain to their physician, a patient is helping the doctor recognize the need for tests or examination that could help reveal the source of the pain and lead to a resolution of the problem.

Pain doesn't just affect your body, it also has a significant impact on your overall quality of life. Expressing an accurate depiction of your pain

to your doctor helps speed up the process for the physician seeking a cure. Don't downplay your pain. Telling the doctor what you are feeling is **NOT** whining or complaining. It is simply helping them know of a symptom that won't show up in your blood work or urinalysis.

When the doctor asks about your pain level, don't base it on how you feel when you have taken over-the-counter pain medication. Express how your pain feels when you don't take any medication. That gives your health care professional sound footing as they start to look at the causes and treatment of your pain. Take time before your appointment to consider what your pain level typically is and determine the most accurate way to express it.

Parents Often Don't Get Rid of Leftover Prescription Opioids

Pills in the home offer teens easy access, expert notes

By Randy Dotinga

MONDAY, May 16, 2016 (HealthDay News) -- When children are prescribed opioid painkillers, such as Oxycontin or Percocet, for surgery or illness, about half of parents say they keep the leftover medicine on hand.

"We found that the amount of pain medication prescribed for children is frequently greater than the amount used, and too few parents recall clear direction from their provider about what to do with leftover medication," said Sarah Clark, co-director of the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

"This is a missed opportunity to prevent prescription drug misuse among children," Clark added in a statement from the University of Michigan Health System. "Many parents simply keep extra pain pills in their home. Those leftover pills represent easy access to narcotics for teens and their friends."

According to the poll results, about a third of parents said their kids had received pain medication prescriptions, mostly for narcotic drugs such as oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percocet) or hydrocodone.

Only 8 percent of parents reported returning the leftover medication to a pharmacy or doctor; 30 percent disposed of the medication in the trash or toilet. Six percent said other family members used the medication, and 9 percent couldn't recall where the medications went.

Only one-third of parents said their child's doctor had discussed what to do with leftover medicine. When providers talked to parents about what to do with any excess drugs, only 26 percent still had leftover pills in the home. But, in homes where doctors didn't give guidance on what to do with the excess pills, 56 percent of parents kept the extra pills at home, the survey found.

"The epidemic of prescription drug abuse affects all sectors of the U.S. population, including children and teens," Clark said. "For adolescents, a known point of access to narcotic pain medication is leftover pills from a prior prescription. Our poll suggests we need to do a much better job of explaining this risk to parents."

*The survey results are based on a poll of nearly 1,200 parents with at least one child aged 5 to 17.
SOURCE: University of Michigan Health System, press release, May 16, 2016*



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Upcoming Geary County Extension Programs

**Requires pre-registration.

MAY

- 24** MPI Parenting Class**—Junction City YMCA, 1703 McFarland Road, Junction City, is a 6-session class open to any parents with children ages toddler to teen to help support and equip parents with the challenging task of raising children. Please call the Geary County Extension Office to register for the program—785-238-4161. The class consists of 6 consecutive sessions held from 5:30—7:30 p.m. on Tuesday evenings. A \$10/session registration fee is required before the class begins. The total cost for the class is \$60.00 per individual or \$90.00 for the parent and a partner/support person. The class continues through June 28.
- 28** Walk Kansas Ends**—Check us out at the Geary County Walk Kansas Facebook page! Post your success story to encourage others.

JUNE

- 7—28** MPI Parenting Class**— See information above. This class continues through June 28.

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Geary County Office information: <http://www.geary.ksu.edu/>
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